

# Christian Community

Vol. 6 No. 9

November, 1954

## THE CHURCH IS CONCERNED ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION

One of the growing concerns of thoughtful Christians is the treatment—or non-treatment—which religion receives at the hands of the public school. The Commission on Christian Social Action in 1952 called attention to the importance of this problem in a statement which began with these words:

The Commission on Christian Social Action holds that the Christian gospel is relevant to every aspect of human life. Insofar as we adhere to this conviction we must find ourselves in conflict with any view which claims the Christian gospel to be partially relevant or irrelevant to the individual and collective life of man.

It is with this conviction that we approach the problem of the relation of religion to public education in the United States. Perhaps no other single institution in our society exercises a more potent influence upon the development of the character and attitudes of our

people than public education. It is therefore of utmost importance that public education be neither hostile nor indifferent to the basic insights and tenets of the Christian faith.

It is our assumption that we may hold to these convictions and still be friendly, strong supporters of public education. We also believe that an exploration or study of the relation of religion to public education will serve to illuminate not only the strengths and inadequacies of public education, but the strengths and deficiencies of organized religion as well, and that such a study, leading to a definite course of action, will result in the mutual strengthening of public education and religion.

The statement went on to point out that the church, no less than the school, had been profoundly affected by the secular outlook of our time. The church had difficulty in communicating its insights to a society which sought to find the source of values in man, particularly

as it limited man to the economic dimension of his life. Public education, in turn, attempted to develop codes of ethics without relation to any historic religion. It dealt with everything from civics to family relations with the conspicuous omission of religion. The divergence of backgrounds in class and community admittedly made it difficult for the teacher to deal with religious practices, movements, and beliefs. Yet the net impression on the pupil was, "What the school does not teach about, does not matter." As a result, observes the Commission's statement:

"Not since the days of Constantine has there been such a complete absence of a Christian background in our culture. We can no longer depend on that culture to reinforce the religious nurture and teaching of the church. Our society in general, and public education and religion in particular, have been deprived of their spiritual rootage. It is this crisis which arouses our basic concern."

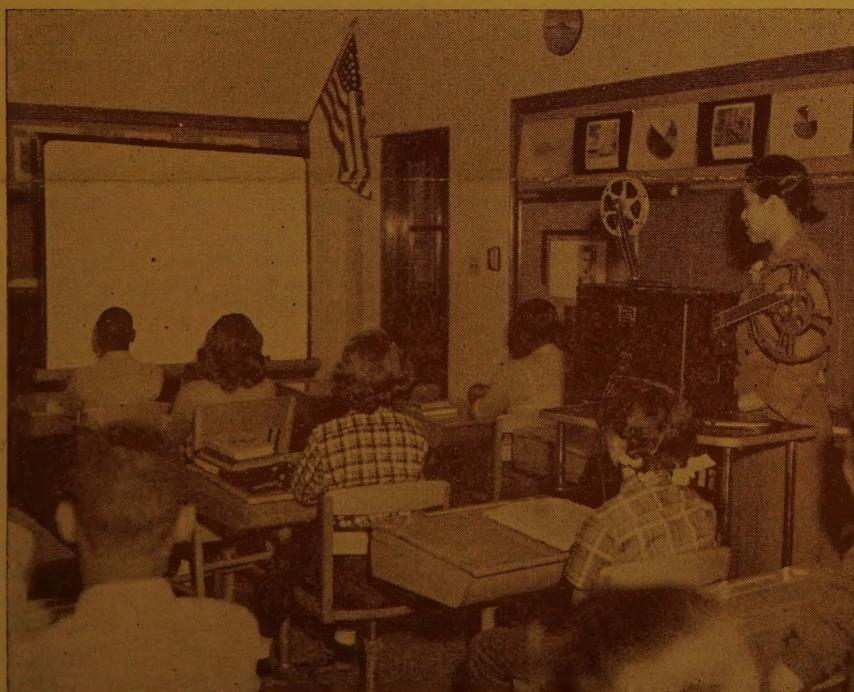
The Commission on Christian Social Action is concerned to inject the Christian spirit into every aspect of our culture. It, therefore, seeks a more positive relationship between religion and education. At the same time, it is conscious of the difficulties faced by educators in our public schools. It would not give comfort to forces which are hostile to our public schools, and it recognizes that limitations which both Protestant dividedness and the heterogeneous character of the American community impose upon the functioning of the school.

### Recommendations Offered

At that time, certain ways of approaching the problem were recommended:

I. We urged leaders in the National Council of Churches and in the educational world to explore more carefully the meaning of our traditional doctrine of the separation of church and state,

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In Public School classrooms like this, children are forming life attitudes toward one another, their world, and their heritage.



## To Pastors and Local Social Action Chairmen

You may use this issue of CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY to good advantage (a) in discussing with your committee the problem of church and school; (b) in personal conference with public school teachers and administrators; (c) in joint meetings of clergy and school people in the local community; (d) in conferences between church school workers, public school teachers, and parents; (e) in general reading. Do not overlook the reading suggestions at the close of the Tiffin Conference group report.

Look carefully at our two new fliers, samples of which are enclosed with this issue. Order for general mailing, group discussion, or your literature table. Or, give them to the individuals and the leaders who are asking about "this social action business."

## The Church Is Concerned

### About Public Education

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to study the curriculum of the schools in the interest of more adequate reference to the objective role of religion in society past and present, to define the role of the school in the community, and to develop a plan for the correlation of church school curricula with the curriculum of the public schools. In part, this aim has been served in the creation of a Department of Religion and Public Education within the Division of Christian Education of the National Council and in the work of the Committee on Religion and Education of the American Council on Education.

II. We urged leaders of religion and public education in local communities to cooperate in support of the public schools, in common efforts to strengthen family life and community welfare, and in eliminating obstacles to religious programs.

III. We urged local congregations through their committees on Christian social action to interpret these developments to their constituency, and to provide opportunities for parents and public school teachers to discuss freely the relation of church, home, and school.

### Sponsor Conferences

In order to promote a better understanding of the problems involved and to encourage constructive action, the Commission conducted a regional conference attended largely by public school

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# REPORT OF THE EDUCATORS' GROUP AT THE TIFFIN CONFERENCE

From June 25 to 27, 1954, nearly two hundred lay men and women of the Evangelical and Reformed Church met at Tiffin, Ohio, in a Conference on the Christian and His Daily Work. Among them were eleven educators and administrators from public schools and colleges. Because of its length, their findings had to be condensed in the Conference Report. Because of its general interest, we herewith offer our readers a more complete version.

The members of this group reside in the four states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois. They constituted teachers and administrators in public elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools, as well as members of Christian college staffs.

Basic problems presented and suggestions for meeting them were as follows:

1. How can a public school teacher be a faithful Christian witness while at the same time observing the basic American principle of the separation of the state and the church?

1) The personal example of the teacher is very important.

a) The public school teacher has a greater opportunity to exercise Christian influence on children and youth in our society than have men in any other vocation, including the ordained clergy.

b) A major responsibility of public schools is to secure competent teachers of various religious persuasions who are faithful in observing their Judeo-Christian beliefs. A Christian teacher cannot enter a classroom in a spirit of "grumpiness" or authoritarianism.

c) By keeping his ears to the ground in school life, a teacher may discover signs of religious resources and needs among pupils; these can be channeled into specific religious activities in which the boys and girls direct the school programs.

2) Religious truths may be presented directly through class and extra-class activities.

a) In those states in which the daily reading of the Bible and prayers are required or permitted, teachers should give special attention to the Bible passages selected and to the manner in which they are read. We commend those teachers who are taking advantage of opportunities to teach their children to say grace at the school lunch period and who assist the boys and girls in home rooms to arrange programs for the chapel meetings.

b) Religious and national holidays, such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter, provide natural settings in which religious truths are taught effectively in the public schools.

c) The schools are encouraging youth to cooperate with other community agencies in promoting Brotherhood Week, the Junior Red Cross, the Hi-Y program, the preparation of clothing packages for Korea, and CARE Packages for peoples in other lands.

d) In the regular courses and subjects taught (history, literature, arithmetic, etc.), teachers find rich opportunities for the teaching of ethical, moral, and religious principles. Music and arts offer excellent means for developing human understanding.

2. What is the fundamental relationship of the Protestant Church and the public schools?

1) Both are deeply concerned with the development and growth of the whole child, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Christian teachers recognize the individual differences that exist among the children, but their basic attitude toward a child is dominated by the knowledge that he is a child of God. The innate worth and dignity of the learner is never forgotten.

2) The Protestant church is one of the most effective agencies through which the purposes, function, programs, and problems of the public schools can be interpreted to the public.



3) Ministerial Associations should be made acquainted with school programs, to encourage cooperation in prompting the welfare of the public schools and in protecting the schools from insidious attacks.

4) Public school teachers and administrators are urged to take inventory of their demands on the time and energy of their pupils with a view to gearing the school program into the broader community life, not overlooking church activities.

5) If possible, criticisms of the school should be discussed with relatively small groups in which each person has opportunities to express his views freely and to exchange opinions with his neighbors and the teachers.

6) Teachers are encouraged to participate in the programs of their respective churches, giving such services as will enrich and vitalize church life.

3. What temptations and ethical problems do teachers encounter?

1) In difficult situations school people may side-step the making of crucial decisions and tend to compromise with policies previously established.

2) Teachers find it especially challenging to counsel with parents and children frankly and freely.

3) It is the measured opinion of this group that the support of school boards depends largely on the intelligent leadership of the school administrators. While there may be individual deviations from the usual practice of supporting teachers of sound Christian character, in general the school boards, the parents, and students maintain a wholesome respect for a teacher who is motivated by Christian principles and convictions.

4. What attitude should our church take toward higher education?

1) We heartily endorse the views expressed by the Commission on Higher Education on page 124 of the Blue Book for 1954 with respect to the specific functions and place of the Christian colleges maintained by the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

2) We recommend that members of our church continue their support of our church colleges by understanding more fully their functions and purposes in the training of our youth for vocations of Christian service; that our clergy, church school teachers and Christian parents be encouraged to challenge the youth of our denomination to select teaching as a life vocation, second only to the ministry of the Word of God; that in preparation for this vocation careful attention and consideration be given to their children's enrollment in our Evangelical and Reformed colleges.

3) We further commend to the church at large a continued and increased financial support of these higher institutions of learning. Our church schools have a significant place in our religious and vocational life. They are forced today to meet the competition of tax supported colleges and universities with almost unlimited budgets and financial resources. Meanwhile our own Christian institutions are faced with a shrinking income from endowments which can only be compensated by higher tuition and increased support from alumni, friends, and the church at large. The colleges have served our church well. The calibre of instruction has been good. Increased funds will strengthen their programs and faculties, thereby enabling our Christian colleges to meet the challenge of our time.

5. What literature is recommended to the layman bearing on teaching as a Christian vocation?

- 1) *Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public School*, Educational Policies Commission NEA, Washington, D. C., 1951
- 2) *Religious Perspectives in College Teaching*, Hazen Foundation, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1952
- 3) *The Function of the Public Schools in Dealing With Religion*, American Council on Education, Washington, D. C., 1953
- 4) *Not Minds Alone*, Kenneth I. Brown, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1954

ROBERT D. SMINK, Chairman

ALFRED FRIEDLI, Secretary

NOTE: Copies of *CHRISTIANS AT WORK*, the Report of the Conference on a Christian and His Daily Work, containing the Conference message and findings of all thirteen vocational groups, may be secured from the Commission on Christian Social Action for 25 cents each, or five for \$1.00.

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administrators with a few clergymen and others, in Allentown, Pennsylvania, in 1953. This conference, under the guidance of Dr. Clarence Linton, who had conducted the American Council on Education study, explored the alternative ways in which schools were dealing with religion. The patterns prevailing were found to be three: (1) Avoidance of the subject of religion; (2) Planned religious activities, such as Bible reading, holiday observances, and baccalaureate services; (3) Factual study of religion in connection with regular courses—history, literature, art, music, etc.

There was agreement as to the importance of the question, the desirability of wise experimentation, and the need for adequate training of teachers if factual study of religion is to be integrated into the curriculum.

The response to this meeting was so favorable that the Commission has been encouraged to continue its explorations and to set up similar conferences in other areas of the country.

### Plan Joint Conference

Two hundred leaders, delegates, and visitors are expected to attend a Conference on Christian Commitment and Christian Community, at the Sheraton-Gibson Hotel, Cincinnati, Ohio, February 1-3, 1955.

Sponsored by the Commissions of Evangelism, Stewardship, and Christian Social Action of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, the conference will be made up of the members of the three commissions, representatives of all synodical committees corresponding to these three commissions, and persons designated by other denominational agencies.

The December issue of *Christian Community* will carry further material concerning the program.

A major purpose of the conference is the preparation of leaders for a denomination-wide emphasis on a more complete commitment for Christian living, to be carried out in local congregations during the fall and winter of 1955-56.

## Remember The

### Churchmen's

### Washington Seminar

February 15-18. Deadline on registrations is January 25. Get your applications, with ten dollar deposit, to the Commission office early.



## Christian Community

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## Speaking of Books

During this period of transition in public school education in the nation, many interested people find themselves at a loss as to where to turn for dependable materials. There are three publications we wish to call to your attention:

1. *The Negro and The Schools* (\$2.75 cloth cover) edited by Harry S. Ashmore, published by the University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. For background on the development of bi-racial education in the South this book has no equal. The development of the "separate but equal" doctrine in education is traced, including the court battles where it was first challenged. The book is an excellent survey of the educational developments in the nation leading to the recent decision of the Supreme Court outlawing segregation in public school education.

2. *Schools in the South* (.20c per copy) published by the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta, Georgia, takes up where the Ashmore Report stops. This book answers the question as to what our next steps are, since the

Court's ruling. It has a number of practical suggestions concerning what ordinary citizens should do to implement the Court's decision. It includes the text of the May 17 decision of the Supreme Court, and is an excellent handbook for those desiring to face the problems of public school desegregation constructively and creatively.

3. *Schools in Transition* (\$3.00 per copy) edited by Robin Williams and Margaret W. Ryan; published by the University of North Carolina Press at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, is the second volume in the series, reporting actual case studies of communities in six border states that have made the change from bi-racial public schools to integrated systems during the past few years. It gives some dependable guidance to these areas which find themselves facing the problem of transition.

Christian people will find the above named books extremely helpful as they face the problems involved in eliminating public school segregation, and upholding the law of the land.

G. L. M.

## Educators To Confer With Church Leaders

Public school teachers, principals, superintendents and members of college departments of education will meet in a conference on Religion and Public Education, in Webster Groves, Missouri, December 29 and 30. National leaders who have been invited to lead discussions include Dr. Clarence Linton, director of the American Council on Education's inquiry into the function of the schools in dealing with religion, and Dr. Rolfe Lanier Hunt, executive director of the Department of Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ.

Sponsoring the conference are the Commission on Christian Social Action of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, the Missouri Valley Synod Committee on Christian Social Action, and a local committee of ministers and school personnel. The Reverend Robert Froeschner, chairman of the Missouri Valley Synodical committee, is chairman of the local committee, and the Reverend Robert D. Brodt, pastor of Peace Memorial Church, Chicago, heads the Commission's subcommittee on religion and public education.

Membership of the conference is limited to the facilities available at Eden Theological Seminary and nearby Thompson House, where sessions will be held. Information may be secured from the Reverend Robert Froeschner, 4138 North Grand Boulevard, St. Louis 7, Missouri.

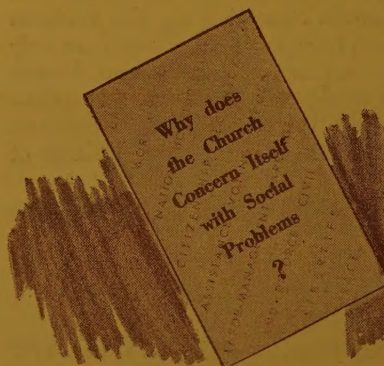
## OUR APOLOGIES

Through an oversight the credit line for the photo on page one of our October issue disappeared. The picture was provided by the Geneva Office of the World Health Organization (WHO).

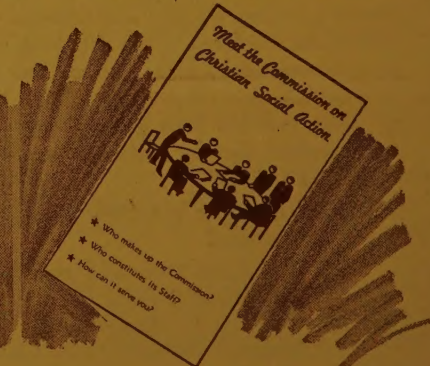
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